

# Ralph Bunche Journal of Public Affairs

Volume 6

Issue 1 2014: *A Banner Year for Institutional Racism*

Article 5

Spring 2017

## Race and Justice Outcomes: Contextualizing Racial Discrimination and Ferguson

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### Recommended Citation

Williams, Jason M. (2017) "Race and Justice Outcomes: Contextualizing Racial Discrimination and Ferguson," *Ralph Bunche Journal of Public Affairs*: Vol. 6 : Iss. 1 , Article 5.

Available at: <http://digitalscholarship.tsu.edu/rbjpa/vol6/iss1/5>

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**M**ainstream criminological research is overwhelmingly correctional and applied. The leading intention behind much of the literature in criminology is couched in a belief that the criminal justice system works and that although there may be some glitches, the system can be perfected. Incidentally, such a belief is void of the reality that “justice” in America, for some individuals, is questionable, unequal, and even brutal. Mainstream research fails to debate the politicality of justice—a topic considered by Quinney (1970; 1974) nearly 45 years ago that brought under question the use of the law as a social control mechanism. Moreover, Packer (1968) and Miller (1973) also considered the political nature of the criminal justice system within their research and models of criminal justice. However, if justice is partial and mainstream criminology is married to state funding for research, then one cannot expect there to be much consideration of alternative views of the criminal justice system within criminological research (Walters 2003; Walters and Presdee 1999) when the state prefers a certain kind of outcome. For instance, research has shown that the criminal justice system disproportionately affects people of color and the poor (Reiman and Leighton 2015; Robinson 2015; Alexander 2010; Tonry 2010). Since justice outcomes are unfavorable toward people of color and the poor, then one can conclude that justice is partial (Richey-Mann 1993).

Moreover, Alexander (2010) has argued that modern day administration of justice acts as a caste system that relegates African-Americans to the bottom of society. Tonry (2010) corroborates Alexander’s sentiment by analyzing the use of punishment in America declaring that African-Americans were targets of the political Southern Strategy, which brought about the War on Drugs and the decapitation of African-American families and communities. However, within this discourse, there was help from criminologists who helped to propel forward a new paradigm of research and punishment, often referred to as administrative criminology (Hudson 1993). Administrative criminology came out of the neoconservative movement that begun in the 1980s in both the US and throughout certain parts of Europe.

Furthermore, administrative criminology, since the 1980s, gave way to a more correctional design of conducting criminological research and administering justice. Hudson (1993) iterated that, “its concern is with the processes themselves; it does not concern itself much with the rights or wrongs of the outcomes, but whether the outcomes can be justified by proper adherence to processes and procedures” (1993, 6). Also, law enforcements’ deep obsession with processes and procedures have become a topic of a major controversy of late given the persistent killing of unarmed African-American men and women throughout the US by law enforcement agents. Regarding the placement of criminologists, Hudson iterates the fundamental definition of administrative criminology as, “criminologists engaged in applied research aimed primarily at assisting criminal justice and penal system professionals in policy development and decision-making. Its objectives are effectiveness and efficiency, and the closer match of practice to policy, rather than any grand theorizing” (1993, 6).

Thus, administrative criminology, an ideology in and of itself, impedes mainstream criminology from conceptualizing the effects of policy fully onto the populace. Nevertheless, the willful neglect of externalities concerning criminal justice processes and policies serves a function to the status quo. For example, if the status quo’s intention is to subjugate a class of people via particular policy measures then naturally the power structure will find ways in which to guarantee its interests, hence the use of administrative criminology in the orchestration of criminal justice policy and procedures.

This paper argues that African-Americans are systematically targeted for punishment in the US. The first part of this paper will underscore the extent to which white supremacy has played a role in African-American punishment. The next section will highlight the extent to which the administration of justice is partial and undemocratic via a brief analysis of the Department of Justice’s (DOJ) (2015) report “Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department.” The paper will continue with a discussion regarding major themes from the DOJ report followed by a conclusion.

### **The Role of White Supremacy**

The role of white supremacy in the administration of justice dates back to slavery. However, complicit in this historical discourse are some pointers on why the criminal justice system operates as it does today. Currently, there is a lack of use regarding historical knowledge within mainstream criminology, but history provides a unique intersectional lens into the complexity of social control. Potter (2015) has accentuated the need for an intersectional criminology that disrupts current paradigms of criminology. She argues that an intersectional lens better allows researchers to understand the nuances of causation and crime control. This paper, however, is concerned about state response to so-called crime.

It is crucial to underscore the degree to which white supremacy is, in fact, an ideology, as its properties are hegemonic and, therefore, transformational. Feagin (2010, 2012) has suggested that white supremacy has dissolved itself into the very fabric of society through processes of framing. He suggests that white racial framing is executed to preserve whiteness and that framing impacts all important social institutions within society (i.e., education, politics,

social control, economics, medicine, etc.). Thus, in the context of social control, white supremacy has long played a quintessential role in racialized social control and the relegation of African-Americans to a ghettoized criminal caste. The subordination of African-Americans began during slavery with the slave codes and survived past the Thirteenth Amendment with the passage the Black Codes and Jim Crow laws.

The relegation of African-Americans to the status of a ghettoized criminal caste was, of course, inspired by fear of African uprisings against the conditions of slavery (Muhammad 2010; Lopez 2006; Berry 1994), and this fear was largely influenced by the Haitian Revolution among many other slave revolts against the inhumanity of slavery and white supremacy. Today this same fear sustains the white racial frame (Feagin 2010). One of the most powerful uses of framing is through the media. In fact, the media has been the foremost victor regarding the scapegoating of African-Americans as criminals and the reason for society's ills (see, e.g., Robinson 2011; Russel-Brown 2009).

Moreover, Wacquant (2001) argued that the ghetto and the prison collides together to create a deadly symbiosis. He underscores the extent to which historical and contemporary mechanisms of punishment against African-Americans are connected to labor markets. To make his claim he invents what he considers the "four peculiar institutions" which are Slavery, Jim Crow, the Ghetto, and the Hyper-ghetto—all of which came about due to changes within the market that relied on the racial and economic subjugation of African-Americans. However, today, he accentuates that market influences within punishment enterprises are directly connected to the obsolescence of the post-Keynesian state and the advent of penal managerialism. Thus, the prison, according to Wacquant, is a social spatial device of ghetto containment and control over surplus populations, typically the marginalized and disposable. Moreover, the prison relegates those within its confines to permanent low wage workers who are inevitably cycled in and out of the prison.

The ghetto, however, has increasingly become similar to the prison, according to Wacquant (2001). He cites an assortment of examples like, surveillance campaigns, fences, and over policing among many other punitive measures that have increasingly reshaped "freedom" within the ghetto. He also includes the changing aesthetics of ghetto schools, as they too have increasingly become punitive in nature with zero tolerance policies, armed officers, and the overuse of punishment against misbehaved disengaged Black and Brown students. His work is corroborated by Rusche and Kirchheimer (2003) whose seminal work also conceptualized the prison as a social institution discursively tied to market forces. Some criminologists have conceptualized the ideology of white supremacy and its relationship with criminology and justice through a colonial framework (Agozino 2003; Tatum 1994; Staples 1975), thus suggesting that ongoing inequalities within the administration of justice are directly related to and a continuation of slavery logics. White framing began with the mass incarceration of freed African-Americans as far back as 1790 (Lawrence-McIntyre 1993). The supposition that modern day inequalities of justice are direct consequences of colonialism has warranted many activists to pontificate about historical connections to modern day justice processes. For example, Black Lives Matter activists frequently speak about the connection between mass incarceration and the convict leasing system that came about as a consequence of the Emancipation Proclamation (Blackmon 2008; Oshinsky 1996). Some scholars have conceptualized contemporary punitiveness under the banner of neoliberalism (Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2011; Wacquant, 2009), thus arguing that cultural changes in social governance (Garland 2001; Simon 2007) has caused a paradigmatic shift in the ways in which punishment and justice are administered.

White racial framing within the administration of justice is manifested in the disproportionality of African-American arrests, incarceration, police-involved shootings, and high recidivism rates. As a result, justice outcomes are predetermined and, therefore, manufactured via mechanisms that ensure the condemnation and criminalization of African-Americans. Some of these mechanisms include the toleration of poverty and other criminogenic influences within African-American communities that often result due to social, economic, and political neglect (Tonry 1996; Wilson 1990; Clark 1965). Certainly these outcomes serve white supremacy, as White communities are consequently able to inherent a false sense of superiority due to the social engineering of Black criminality and subordination. The criminal justice system, especially departments of "corrections" simply are not designed to rehabilitate African-Americans, but are rather holding pits where individuals graduate into deeper spaces of hopelessness and disconnectedness (see, e.g., Sykes 1958; Wacquant 2001; 2009). Within the context of the white racial frame, punishment and caste have been and continue to be the foremost options for African-Americans.

### **Differentiating the Administration of Justice**

Through neoliberal logic, punishment is sold to the masses as a necessary paternalistic idea designed to help those who are not adult enough to help themselves (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011), which is a fundamental belief in white supremacist ideology regarding African-Americans. Thus, corrections (the prison) is falsely flaunted as a "restorative" measure, its effects are damaging and debasing to those who are caught up in the paternalistic web of corrections. The institution of the prison is also rather peculiar in a so-called free and democratic society. Ironically, the prison is the sole indicator of freedom; for example, one knows he is free precisely because he is not imprisoned.

Through this faulty logic the prison is conceptualized as a tool for democracy, it helps to ensure the livelihood of democracy even though its processes are staunchly opposite of democracy.

Nevertheless, what limits most individuals from understanding the conundrum of prisons within a democracy is that the use of punishment, for the most part, has always been classed and race-based. Punishment is a quintessential response to the “others” within any exclusive society, and since it is least likely to affect the majority negatively, it is therefore accepted as a function of democracy, as it ensures the superiority and value systems of the majority to the detriment of the excluded. Given the logic above, the hyper-incarceration of African-Americans is, therefore, simply considered a means of practicing democracy—a rogue democracy nonetheless, and a price of sustaining white supremacy.

Moreover, one’s introduction into the criminal justice system typically hinges on his/her ability to follow conduct norms. For instance, Sellin (1938) has suggested that law and order discourses are largely motivated by cultural contexts. Thus, those who are more likely to find themselves on the wrong side of the law are often groups or individuals who do not fit into the mainstream culture. In fact, he accentuates that, “[c]onflicts of cultures are inevitable when the norms of the one cultural or subcultural area migrate to or come in contact with those of another” (as cited in Jacoby, Severance, and Bruce 2012, 262). Nevertheless, what is missing within Sellin’s (1938) conception of culture conflict and crime is the question on how countercultures are cultivated. Understanding the cultivation of countercultures is key to understanding the conflict that results in the friction between cultures (Curtis 1975). Furthermore, underlying implications of conflict are typically rooted in political discourses inherently linked to exclusive and xenophobic ideologies whose sole mission is to divide and conquer.

To better understand the place of African-Americans within the paradigm of culture conflict, one must revisit the plight and institutional placing of African-Americans since slavery, and the various political and legal maneuvers that were used to ensure their subordination (Marable 2007; Myrdal 1962). After doing so, one quickly comes to see that countercultures can be the result of exclusionary policies, perhaps (in)directly designed to create disarray, disorganization, and therefore criminal opportunities for those individuals or groups affected. As previously mentioned, Wacquant (2001) highlighted the extent to which slavery has gone through an evolutionary process which traces to the modern hyper-ghetto. While it is important to understand group conflict and its relationship with the law, it is also important to understand the discursive power dynamics that creates mainstream and countercultures. In the United States, these dynamics are overwhelmingly governed via racial, gendered, and classed lens, thus implicating that countercultures are not created in a vacuum. In fact, by understanding the ways in which race, gender, and class collide to form reality and experiences, one can uncover the political and sociological context that lies at the foundation of mainstream and countercultures.

Also, the urban ghetto counterculture ascribed to African-Americans today is a direct result of white supremacist policies that have long quarantined them beyond the margins of society (Alexander 2010), thus, relegating them to criminogenic spaces and circumstances that easily leads to criminality. However, this criminality is also manufactured, as it is an eponymous expression of the policies that created the ghetto in the first place. The continued purposeful placement of African-Americans in criminogenic spaces is simply the continuation of the colonial practice of subjugation. The outcomes of such a system are clear, the mass incarceration of African-Americans become expected, normalized, and justified within a “cultural logic” intrinsically tied to the so-called nature of African-Americans, albeit minimalist at best. Nevertheless, constant media representation of African-Americans as criminals (Robinson 2011; Russel-Brown 2009), more than help to concretize the mythology of African-American offending into the minds of the majority as well as some African-Americans. These processes are indicative of the framing notated by Feagin in the prior section.

The punishment discourses within countercultures can be conceptualized as double victimization, as individuals from these spaces are punished for adapting to an environment in which they are forcefully confined. The confinement of individuals within a counterculture forces one to rationally commit crime, yet the response to these behaviors is to punish. Such a conundrum presents a discursive intersectional lens to the role of punishment in an unequal society where individuals are classified. For example, current events like Ferguson and Baltimore illuminates the extent to which the administration of justice serves a distinct role in quarantined spaces. In the aftermath of the Ferguson demonstrations, the DOJ (2015) conducted a full investigation into law enforcement and municipal court practices in the small Missouri town. The results of the report are crucial toward understanding willful racial differentiations within the administration of justice, and while the results from Ferguson are indeed limited to Ferguson, there have been similar reports in other jurisdictions worth analyzing too (i.e., Albuquerque, Cleveland, New Orleans, Newark, Maricopa County, East Haven, Detroit, Baltimore, Portland, Seattle, Miami, and others). The subsequent subsection, however, is strictly tied to the Ferguson report.

### **Ferguson DOJ Report on Police Practices**

The DOJ (2015) report found that Ferguson police officers routinely violated the Constitutional rights of African-Americans, which resulted in a pattern of unlawful practices by the police agency (see, table 1). These patterns of unconstitutional practices created racial hostility between the community members and law enforcement officers that ultimately lead to the uprisings in the wake of Michael Brown's death, an African-American youth killed by Officer Darren Wilson of the Ferguson Police Department (FPD). The report also indicated that there are not measures in place that respond to misconduct of officers. The inaction regarding illegal practices exists because misconduct appears to be threaded into the fabric of the FPD. Such an absence of control breeds misconduct and racially conscious differential law enforcement practices because if officers know there are not any repercussions, then like a common criminal, they will not be deterred from violating the rights of citizens. Nevertheless, a major caveat from the report is in the finding that, "FPD officers frequently detain people without reasonable suspicion and arrest people without probable cause" (DOJ 2015, 16). The report illuminated several examples to exemplify this widely used unlawful practice:

For example, in July 2013 police encountered an African-American man in a parking lot while on their way to arrest someone else at an apartment building. Police knew that the encountered man was not the person they had come to arrest. Nonetheless, without even reasonable suspicion, they handcuffed the man, placed him in the back of a patrol car, and ran his record. It turned out he was the intended arrestee's landlord. The landlord went on to help the police enter the person's unit to effect the arrest, but he later filed a complaint alleging racial discrimination and unlawful detention. Ignoring the central fact that they had handcuffed a man and put him in a police car despite having no reason to believe he had done anything wrong, a sergeant vigorously defended FPD's actions, characterizing the detention as "minimal" and pointing out that the car was air conditioned. Even temporary detention, however, constitutes a deprivation of liberty and must be justified under the Fourth Amendment. *Whren v. United States*, 517 U.S. 806, 809-10 (1996) (2015, 17).

*Table 1: Major Patterns in Ferguson Police Practices*

- 
- FPD Engages in a Pattern of Unconstitutional Stops and Arrests in Violation of the Fourth Amendment
  - FPD Engages in a Pattern of First Amendment Violations
  - FPD Engages in a Pattern of Excessive Force in Violation of the Fourth Amendment
- 

Source: Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department, Department of Justice, April 2015 (pgs., 16, 24, & 28).

[http://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/pressreleases/attachments/2015/03/04/ferguson\\_police\\_department\\_report.pdf](http://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/pressreleases/attachments/2015/03/04/ferguson_police_department_report.pdf)

The DOJ (2015) report further accentuated that police officers patrolled the community with brute force, obsessively checking to see if individuals had warrants as opposed to attending to criminal or other police-related concerns within the community. The inclination to essentially harass individuals shows the degree to which public safety had become a secondary issue for the police department and harassment the primary duty. For example, the report iterated that, "[m]any of the unlawful stops we found appear to have been driven, in part, by an officer's desire to check whether the subject had a municipal arrest warrant pending" (2015, 17). Unconstitutional stops were termed pedestrian stops or "ped checks" (2015, 18) by law enforcement. Such stops were often conceptualized as Terry stops even though police officers did not always have a legitimate or legal basis for stopping and detaining individuals.

In another case, officers responded to a call about a man selling drugs by stopping a group of six African-American youths who, due to their numbers, did not match the facts of the call. The youths were "detained and ped checked." Officers invoke the term "ped check" as though it has some unique constitutional legitimacy. It does not. Officers may not detain a person, even briefly, without articulable reasonable suspicion (DOJ 2015, 18).

The police department routinely made arrests without probable cause as indicated by the report. For example, individuals were arrested countless times without the elements of the alleged charge being met:

For example, in November 2013, an officer approached five African-American young people listening to music in a car. Claiming to have smelled marijuana, the officer placed them under arrest for disorderly conduct based on their "gathering in a group for the purposes of committing illegal activity." The young people were detained and charged—some taken to jail, others delivered to their parents—despite the officer finding no marijuana, even after conducting an inventory search of the car (DOJ, 2015, p. 18).

Examples such as the excerpt above show a blatant disregard for the rights of African-Americans in Ferguson. These kinds of interactions are considered routine according to the report along with various journalistic accounts indicating residents' distrust with the FPD. The trust between the community and police was especially severed with highly discretionary stops that proceeded unlawfully, for example, "in February 2012, an officer wrote an arrest

notification ticket for Peace Disturbance for ‘loud music’ coming from a car. The arrest ticket appears unlawful as the officer did not assert, and there is no other indication, that a third party was disturbed by the music—an element of the offence” (DOJ 2015, 18). The obsessive occupation with targeting African-Americans lead to the FPD having disproportionate contact with that one segment of their community, subsequently causing extreme distrust (see table 2). The report documents that disproportionate African-American contact was widely racially inspired.

Table 2: Ferguson Law Enforcement’s Disproportionate Impact on African-Americans

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- Ferguson’s law enforcement actions impose a disparate impact on African-Americans that violates Federal law
  - Ferguson’s law enforcement practices are motivated in part by discriminatory intent in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment and other Federal laws
  - Ferguson’s law enforcement practices erodes trust, especially among Ferguson’s African-American residents, and make policing less effective, more difficult, and less safe
- 

Source: Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department, Department of Justice, April 2015 (pgs. 63, 70, & 79). [http://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/pressreleases/attachments/2015/03/04/ferguson\\_police\\_department\\_report.pdf](http://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/pressreleases/attachments/2015/03/04/ferguson_police_department_report.pdf)

In addition, the DOJ (2015) report included a number of emails, and “[t]hese email exchanges involved several police and court supervisors, including FPD supervisors and commanders” (2015, 72). One of the emails “depicted President Barack Obama as a chimpanzee” (2015, 72). Furthermore, another one indicated that President Obama would not maintain the presidency for an additional term because “what black man holds a steady job for four years” (2015, 72). These emails, although just two examples among others, show a level of racist beliefs held by law enforcement agents that are supposed to uphold the law equally—free from racial impediments and, yet, through these emails their indifference to African-Americans are profoundly highlighted. In fact, many African-American community members accused the FPD of openly using racial obscenities against them, and these accusations are also addressed affirmatively within the report.

Moreover, with regard to racial stereotyping, “[s]everal Ferguson officials [told investigators] that it is a lack of ‘personal responsibility’ among African American members of the Ferguson community that causes African Americans to experience disproportionate harm under Ferguson’s approach to law enforcement” (DOJ 2015, p. 74). Thus, “cultural differences” were used as logical justifications for harm-doing against African-Americans in the town of Ferguson, a tactic born of centuries of white racial framing. As mentioned earlier, accusations of bad or oppositional culture are typically used as a tactic for justifying differential treatment against countercultures and other excluded populations. Ironically while officials accused African-Americans of having a lack of responsibility, they routinely wrote off tickets among themselves. For instance, “[i]n November 2011, a court clerk received a request from a friend to ‘fix a parking ticket’ received by the friend’s coworker’s wife. After the ticket was faxed to the clerk, she replied: ‘It’s gone baby!’” (2015, 75). On the contrary, the report highlights a lack of responsibility with city officials.

## Discussion

While the former section is a limited analysis of the DOJ (2015) report, the quotes highlighted suggest that the administration of justice can be selective and undemocratic. The FPD utilized cultural and racial stereotypes to justify systematic discrimination in the way in which they *understood* and *enforced* the law. The subsequent product is disproportionate contact with African-Americans and criminalization. The practices of the FPD are a clear function of white racial framing via the hegemonic belief that African-American subordination is a necessity. Officials believed, for the most part, that their actions were justifiable—that, in fact, African-Americans did not take personal responsibility seriously and were therefore at fault for the tumultuous relationship between themselves and the FPD. This is a widely held belief by many mainstreamers throughout American society.

Moreover, the alleged lack of self-responsibility within the African-American community in a white supremacist context, gives Whites and, thus the state, the ability to act as a parent over presumably incorrigible uncivilized individuals in need of discipline. Thus, the harm handed down to the African-American community is the product of “tough love” delicately hidden within the idea of democratic discipline from the superior class because punishment, in this context, symbolizes civilization and freedom. These thought processes are devastating to a free and democratic society and are staunchly reminiscent of past beliefs and practices that dehumanized African-Americans. The DOJ (2015) report vividly and masterfully captures the delusion of so-called post-racialism as a maxim of President Obama’s reign to the US Presidency. In fact, the very emails demonizing President Obama were likewise disrespectful to the Office of the Presidency; this shows the extent to which ideas of post-racialism is at best a smokescreen over the truth that the US is still a racist society incapable of accepting Blackness as a reputable source of democratic power.

Nevertheless, the impact of racism on and within the administration of justice clearly articulates the degree

to which the criminal justice system is, at times, willfully anti-“minority”. While the report cited in this paper is restricted to Ferguson, its results mirror many lived experiences of African-American communities around the US. Thus, the oppositional arguments to this reality are attempts to surrender African-Americans from speaking about their lived experiences and the culture of neocolonialism that now governs the administration of justice today. Moreover, racial stereotyping in the Ferguson context is a product of white racial framing that places African-Americans at the bottom of the community. This hierarchical conception of (de)valuing lives is the very essence that created the Black Lives Matter movement, which problematizes the injustices of framing.

## Conclusion

The arguments covered in this paper illustrate the extent to which the criminal justice system and its processes can be used to institute institutional racism. Unfortunately in the case Ferguson and many other areas, the marriage between white supremacy and justice often end with individuals losing their lives or having their livelihoods forever challenged by manufactured barriers designed to quarantine them beyond the margins of society. Such a reality is not only undemocratic, but it is also inhumane. More important, the undemocratic nature and cruelty of unjust practices must be humanized academically. Thus, the strict use of so-called scientifically objective tools creates a colonizing effect on the discipline’s ability to forthrightly capture the lived and human experiences of living in and experiencing such an unjust, partial, and inhumane system. Criminologists must begin to construct paradigms within which to study the *real* impact white supremacy has on justice outcomes like those uncovered in Ferguson and so many other jurisdictions. Lastly, criminology’s obsession with hyper-individualism (a derivative of neoliberalism and administrative criminology) fails to capture the full context which undoubtedly includes external and sometimes hidden forces like white supremacy, social economic and political exclusion, and other social impediments that are framed within xenophobic ideologies of exclusion to the detriment of those frequently caught in the web of the criminal justice system. Criminology’s seemingly willful failure to capture the points as mentioned above will most certainly be the cause of its increasingly clear demise as a reputable discipline of social integrity.

## Author’s Biography

Aside from doing research for the academic audience, Dr. Williams is also involved in many public research and information forums, such as The Hampton Institution where he serves as chair of the criminal justice department. He has also published pieces at Uprooting Criminology and Truthout. Prior to joining Montclair State University, Dr. Williams has taught a variety of criminal justice and sociology courses at Fairleigh Dickinson University, New Jersey City University, Texas Southern University, and John Jay College of Criminal Justice. His areas of expertise are race, ethnicity and crime, criminological/criminal justice theory, critical criminology, critical policing, social control, criminal justice policy, qualitative methods, and the sociology of knowledge. He is also co-editor of, *A Critical Analysis of Race and the Administration of Justice* published by Cognella.

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